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ABSTRACT

This newsletter, which is published monthly during the school year, disseminates ideas and suggestions concerning innovations and problem solutions for secondary social science. This issue contains a lead article on the role of the school and the teacher in values education. A short check list of questions is provided for those who ask if students are getting adequate exposure to values in the classroom. Suggestions to help teachers introduce studies involving values are made. A few topics are selected in American history and literature with a view to studying in depth the reasons and motives of the protagonists in given episodes. Those interested in receiving the newsletter should write to: Mr. Raymond English, Director, Social Science Program, Educational Research Council of America, Rockefeller Building, Cleveland, Ohio 44113. The price is $5.00 a year. Information and ideas from readers are welcomed. (Author/RM)

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you, too

The Social Science Newsletter for Secondary Teachers, distributed by the Educational Research Council of America

THE PERENNIAL QUESTION OF VALUES: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL

In February 1972, Volume I, Number 3, of *you, too* was devoted to the topic of values in the classroom. Teachers continue to be concerned over this matter. Perhaps a few further comments are in order.

It must be recognized that the schools cannot and should not try to form the whole characters and value systems of their pupils. Home, church, community, and peer-groups are inevitably more influential in these spheres than the school can be. This generalization is less true of boarding schools, but these institutions are not our main interest at this point.

What, then, is the role of the school and the teacher in the field of values, that is, in ethics and aesthetics? As in most other fields, the answer is to offer the students *knowledge*. Knowledge includes great ideas, vicarious experiences, and techniques of analysis, discussion, judgment, and decision.

A teacher of music would not, presumably, attempt to *compel* students to prefer Beethoven to Janis Joplin. The teacher would, however, consider it a necessary part of a course in musical appreciation to expose the students to Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. Exposure would include explanation, analysis, and comment. In other words, students would be given a chance to *know* about music, and especially about its more sophisticated and difficult forms and expressions.

The same broad rule applies in all fields where values (choices, preferences, commitment, decision) come into play. There is so much knowledge that is available and that is helpful, that one wonders what all the fuss over values education is about. If every teacher stuck to the business of augmenting the students knowledge, there would be little question about how and what to teach about values: the school year would be all too short.

TESTIMONY OF JOHN STUART MILL AND PLATO

In his essay on *Utilitarianism*, the philosopher John Stuart Mill makes a comment that seems apt to the present question.

> Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighting quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account.

In other words, knowledge is essential to effective choice and decision. A person who knows only the dramatic offerings of commercial television is at an extreme disadvantage compared with a person who has read and understood Shakespeare and Sophocles. A person who knows nothing of the history of art and architecture is necessarily blind to thousands of fascinating aesthetic phenomena.

> It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides.[1]

In morals, knowledge alone is not always decisively important. There are, doubtless, ingrained qualities of character (things in the "affective domain") that may override knowledge and reason. But the teacher cannot do much — if indeed he can do anything — to alter the emotional and appetitive make-up of the student.

There is still plenty of knowledge about morality that can be purveyed and that will help students to make intelligent decisions. How many recidivist criminals are ignorant and relatively uneducated? Plato summed up the case for knowledge as the basis of morality when he said: "No man *knowingly* does evil." That is to say: if we really know (and are convinced that we know) the nature and consequences of an evil action, we will not commit that action.

How does one learn the nature and consequences of good and evil? Partly from personal experience and observation, but also from vicarious experience. Vicarious experience includes writings in philosophy, religion, and creative literature; it includes history and biography. These vicarious experiences are the business of formal education.

[1] John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapter 1. Reprinted in Edwin A. Burtt (ed.), *The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill* (New York: Modern Library, 1939 and later), pp. 901-02.

A SHORT CHECK LIST

The teacher or administrator who wonders whether students are getting adequate exposure to "values education" might do worse than ask the following questions.

Have students been exposed to some guided listening to classical music?

Have they learned something about the history of art and architecture — can they recognize the style of the Italian Renaissance masters, the Flemish school, early and late Gothic church architecture, Louis Sullivan, classical Greek sculpture . . . ?

Have they been asked to read Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Dickens, Melville, Homer, Wordsworth, Molière . . . ?

Have they been given a chance to appreciate great poetry?

Do they know something about Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam?

Have they been asked to read parts of the Bible?

Do they know something about Plato, Socrates, Moses, Aristotle, Aquinas, Luther . . . ?

Do they know something about Marxism-Leninism, about Idealism, Jeffersonian democracy . . . ?

Have they read some significant decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States?

Have they studied in depth some historical episodes, such as the American Revolution, the French or Russian Revolutions, the Nazi regime, World War II, the Great Depression, the Peloponnesian War . . . ?

Have they been asked to read some biographies and autobiographies: Lincoln, Washington, Douglass, Henry Adams, Malcolm X, *Plutarch's Lives* . . . ?

Have they studied one or two field reports by anthropologists?

One could add many similar probing questions, all of them directed right to the heart of values education. The more one thinks about the matter, the more absurd all the fuss about values education in our time becomes. Every good teacher is teaching about values much of the time, and, if he is stressing the importance of searching for knowledge, he is doing a good job.

ANOTHER ENDORSEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE

The English teacher and writer H.N. Brailsford was a passionate believer in both socialism and the virtues of education. He devoted considerable time to adult education in the Workers' Education Association.

He wrote of his experiences in this field that the saddest thing was to watch intelligent but relatively ignorant men and women arguing and speculating about great ideas without any notion of what had already been said about them. Problems that had been thrashed out by philosophers and scientists would be discussed in an atmosphere of pathetic, childish ignorance and innocence. The challenge, according to Brailsford, was to persuade his students to begin by recognizing their ignorance. Once this healthy awareness had been attained, the process of education could go ahead.

The moral is applicable to many a high school class, and especially a class in which students want to discuss controversial matters like values.

POSSIBLE SNAGS IN VALUES EDUCATION

One of the reasons for the concern of many teachers with the values education question is the fear of backlash from various groups in the community. We live in a pluralistic society. We also live in a period of moral and aesthetic insecurity and unrest resulting from rapid technological change, unprecedented social mobility, and equally unprecedented cultural interchange that is highlighted by television. These things all contribute to hypersensitivity among those who are afraid that their children's values will be undermined and also, paradoxically, among those who *want* to undermine traditional values and replace them with values suited to a brave new world.

The teacher, not unnaturally, feels threatened. He or she is tempted to wash his or her hands of the whole business of values education.

No one can be more aware of this threat and this temptation than the authors of the ERCA Social Science Program. The program attempts, quite consciously, to expose youngsters to knowledge of varied value systems, and to help them to think critically and constructively about value judgments. The program tries, too, to help students to be realistic, that is, to see the difference between enunciating heartwarming platitudes, and making intelligent, workable decisions in complex, and often conflict-fraught, social situations. As a result the program has been attacked as conservative, radical, superpatriotic, anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, racist, militarist, leftist, unfair to Communists, unfair to businessmen, and over-enthusiastic for the market economy.

In all honesty, the authors reject these contradictory imputations. The ERCSSP is concerned with knowledge, not with indoctrination, or molding character or convictions (except insofar as acquiring

knowledge and respect for knowledge is a character-forming process).

Yet every now and again comes the temptation to drop the idea of offering knowledge of controversial, complex, and sophisticated ideas to the youngsters. Why not retreat to the old vapid textbook pabulum? Why not give the pupils a mass of "facts" — preferably morally neutral facts — and require them to memorize them? Why not steer clear of any disturbing problems or topics? Why not, when in doubt, throw in some vague approbation of a platitudinous term like "justice" or "freedom," and avoid any attempt to define or give concrete applications of the term?

Such solutions are not really solutions at all. To adopt them is to turn social science education into a process of boring irrelevance. Moreover, insofar as the lessons of such neutral noncontroversial social science stick at all in the students' minds, they are still teaching values of a kind. The values they teach are anti-intellectualism, materialism, and sentimentalism.

There is no acceptable alternative to teaching knowledge, including knowledge of and about values and value systems. Such teaching is not easy. It calls for knowledge on the teacher's part. It calls, too, for great sensitivity and objectivity.

The word "objectivity" suggests a further problem. Can one teach knowledge of values in a "value-free" spirit. The great German social scientist Max Weber maintained that this was possible, but his own brilliant writings do not live up to his claim.[2]

What can be done? First, one must expound as objectively and as sympathetically as possible any given value or value system. One must try to see it through the eyes of its adherents. But, secondly, in many cases one must go on to deal with it critically in terms of other value systems.

For example: one might explain the Southern pro-slavery argument and later racist theories on the same lines, but one need not leave students with the impression that such ideas are acceptable —mere matters of opinion or social interest or prejudice. One might discuss the rationale of cannibalism without implying that it is a reasonable alternative dietetic system for societies in the contemporary world. One might explain Marxism-Leninism in theory and practice, but one need not suggest that censorship, regimentation, state monopoly, brain-washing, and terror are morally equal to freedom of expression and association, mixed economic institutions, competitive elections, and the ideal of fair trial. Other value judgments would call for greater conscious efforts at objectivity and neutrality of comment. Yet it would be patently absurd for a teacher to pretend to complete open-mindedness in discussing religions, sects, ideologies, and matters of aesthetic taste. No student is deceived by such pretensions. A textbook may, by dint of extreme exertion on the part of authors, consultants, and editors, achieve something approaching sympathetic impartiality (if the contradictory phrase may be allowed), but the teacher in the classroom would be well advised to indicate his or her own convictions, and, having done so, to strain to achieve impartiality and accuracy in expounding points of view other than those he or she holds personally.

If the teacher is committed to the pursuit of knowledge, this prescription is not unworkable.

> My son, if thou wilt, thou shalt
> be taught:
> and if thou wilt apply thy mind,
> thou shalt be prudent.
> If thou love to hear, thou shalt
> receive understanding:
> and if thou bow thine ear,
> thou shalt be wise.
>
> (Ecclesiasticus 6:32-33.)

POSSIBLE CASE STUDIES

Teachers often ask for suggestions as to how to introduce studies involving values. Actually almost any topic in social science involves values. How can one discuss personal consumer economics, or government policies, or the Middle East, or the Westward Movement, or the code of Hammurabi, or — you name it — without considering questions of values?

Yet it might be a good idea to select a few topics with a view to studying in depth the reasons and motives of the protagonists in given episodes. Here are a few possibilities.

1. Lincoln's decision to compel the seceding states to engage in open aggression. The history books often gloss over this grave — even grim — decision. One might contrast Lincoln's belligerence at this time with his opposition to the Mexican War 16 years before.

2. The Mexican War itself is a good topic. Consider Polk, the views of Northerners and Southerners, and the Mexican point of view.

3. In the same period, the Abolitionists offer a fascinating study in ends and means, higher justice, self-sacrifice, and fanatical self-righteousness. A useful point of departure might be Aileen S. Kraditor's *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850* (New York: Pantheon, 1969). Consider also the *volte face* of Garrison and others on the subject of war and violence in 1860-61.

[2] See "Science as a Vocation" and "Politics as a Vocation" in *From Max Weber*, edited by Gerth and Mills (New York: Oxford University Press).

The above are from a brief period of American history, but many similar case studies might be made. More difficult to find are case studies involving private individuals: cases where a man or woman faces grave personal choices. Here one finds oneself turning to literature. Such books as the following might be used:

Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage.*

Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov.*

Tolstoy, *War and Peace* — episodes like Natasha's elopement, or Nicholas's gambling spree, or Pierre's search for a value system.

Herman Wouk, *The Caine Mutiny.*

Rudyard Kipling's short stories: many of these offer studies in values, since Kipling was fascinated by culture contrasts and characters in moments of conflict, suffering, and fear. Jack London's short stories have much the same concerns.

Another approach might be through biographies, autobiographies, letters, and diaries of persons not in positions of public responsibility. Obvious examples are the *Confessions* of St. Augustine or of Rousseau. Other possibilities: parts of Emerson's *Journals* and Samuel Butler's *Notebooks* (compare his autobiographical novel, *The Way of All Flesh*). Mr. Justice Holmes's letters contain valuable insights, but he was a judge of the Supreme Court. Then there's Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua.* Consider, too, Ernest Jones's *Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, Boswell's *Johnson*, Edgar Johnson's biographies of Dickens and Scott. The *Autobiography* of Benvenuto Cellini is very exciting, and John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* offers insights into the development of a sensitive intellectual. Mark Twain has been the subject of two or three exceptionally interesting studies. Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*, Anne Frank's *Diary*, the life story of Helen Keller, Somerset Maugham's *The Summing Up*, Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail*, Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, Jacob Riis's *The Making of an American* — all or any of these might serve as material for values education in terms of the private person — the moral decisions and dilemmas of persons not in the public eye.

One is tempted to add some films that could be used in values education: *The Caine Mutiny*, *Shane*, *The Bridge on the River Quai*, and similar classics. However, this approach opens up another set of problems, since the better the movie, the less it lends itself to contemplative discussion.

Please send in your own ideas and suggestions on these challenging subjects.